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RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6791
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4520
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3141
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7664
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1739
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5075
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1281
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INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7406

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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KMDR PREL KPAO OPRC SY

SUBJECT: Asad Speech/Nomination, Syria/PLO, Syria/UK, Syria/Italy,
Iraq, Palestinian Territories (5/11-13)

¶11. Summary: Syrian papers on May 11 reported President Asad's speech at the first session of the new People's Assembly on May 10, which approved the nomination of President Asad for a second seven-year term as president and set May 27 as the date for the presidential referendum.

Papers also reported VP Shara's meeting on May 10 with Farouk al-Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Talks focused on the situation in the Palestinian territories and efforts to enhance Palestinian national reconciliation and rebuild the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

On Syrian-British relations, papers reported FM Mouallem's meeting on May 10 with Peter Gooderham, Director for Middle East & North Africa in the United Kingdom's Foreign Office. Talks focused on bilateral relations and regional developments, particularly in Iraq, LebQon and in the Palestinian territories.

FM Mouallem reiterated Syria's support for efforts to achieve national reconciliation in Iraq and make the political process a success, stressing the need to schedule withdrawal of foreign troops and build the national army on national bases. Regarding Lebanon, Mouallem confirmed Syria's support for all that the Lebanese agree upon to achieve security and stability in Lebanon.

Papers on May 12 featured an interview with Italian Deputy PM and Foreign Minister, Massimo Dalima, published on May 11 in the Italian Weekly "L'Espresso," in which he reiterated the importance of his talks with FM Mouallem on the sidelines of the Sharm al-Sheikh Conference and expressed his intention to visit Syria soon. Dalima stressed Syria's desire to cooperate to find solutions in the region. Dalima denied reports of Hezbollah smuggling weapons in south Lebanon, describing them as baseless. On Iraq, Dalima said the uni-polar policy era has ended and there is now a return to multi-lateral policy and the search for solutions based on dialogue.

Independent al-Watan on May 11 published a Reuters report citing Fatah al-Islam group in Lebanon as saying that four of its members were killed in a clash with Syrian security forces while trying to cross into Iraq.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad delivers a speech at the People's Assembly: Our priority is to protect the interests of the widest sector of Syrian masses. National decisions are above international resolutions. Signing the UN Charter doesn't mean endorsing interests of the United States. We have achieved good levels of economic growth in spite of the hard political circumstances. We work to help Iraq, and not to save the occupation troops from their impasse. The return of Golan is non-negotiable. We have not authorized any party to negotiate on our behalf. We are not intimidated by threats" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/11)

"The People's Assembly unanimously approves the nomination of President Asad for new seven-year constitutional presidential term of office. The People's Assembly determines May 27th is the date for conducting popular referendum on the presidency" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/12)

"PM Shara to Farouk al-Qaddoumi [Head of the Political Department of the Palestinian Liberation Organization]: Palestinian National unity achieves aspirations of the Palestinian people" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/11)

"FM Mouallem holds talks with a British delegation on scheduling a timetable for withdrawal from Iraq" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/11)

"Italian Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister D'Alima: I will visit Syria soon" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/12)

"Bush extends sanctions against Syria" (Independent al-Watan, 5/11)

"Israeli Foreign Ministry recommends commencement of negotiations with Syria" (Independent al-Watan, 5/11)

"The Fatah al-Islam group in Lebanon announces the killing of four of its members in a clash with Syrian security forces at the Syrian-Iraqi border" (Independent al-Watan, 5/11)

"The Iraqi Parliament adopts a resolution rejecting security walls. Four US soldiers killed or kidnapped in Baghdad" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/13)

"Iraqis call for scheduling withdrawal of foreign troops. Four US soldiers killed in various attacks, the fiercest of which were in Diyala" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/12)

"Fatah and Hamas agree on withdrawing armed men from Gaza streets" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/13)

"Confrontations in Gaza foil the security plan" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/12)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Syrians' Option"

Isam Dari, Chief Editor of government-owned Tishreen, wrote (5/12): "Syria under President Asad managed, with its calm policy and rational and logical approach, to overcome the hardest plight in its modern and contemporary history, to avoid falling into the traps that were set in its way, to face the hurricane that hit the region, and to adapt to formidable changes without abandoning its national and pan-Arab policies and its constant principles....

"President Asad's decisions, as captain of the Syrian ship, are not personal or impulsive or reactions to certain actions or sudden developments. Rather, they are positions, policies, and options of our Syrian Arab people. They are based on an unwavering belief in Arabism, the national identity, and the free, dignified, and sovereign homeland....

"Syria stands on solid ground embodied by a national unity that is rarely matched in today's troubled world.

"The choices of Syrians are the same national and pan-Arab choices that President Asad briefly expressed in his important speech to the People's Assembly...."

"Culture of Resistance and Course of Capitulation"

Hanan Hamad, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (5/12): "We wonder what Arabs did to benefit from the defeat of Israel in Lebanon and from the predicament of Americans in Iraq....

"Arab regimes are making a mistake and miscalculation by exaggerating Israel's power to stifle the culture of resistance and encourage calls for surrender and concessions through separate and partial treaties that have brought nothing but failure....

"Despite the Winograd Report and the Baker-Hamilton recommendations, some Arab regimes, under the pretext of 'marketing the Arab peace plan,' are still extending a helping hand to those who are sinking in Iraq's quicksand and to the heads that are rolling as a result of the erupting July volcano. But the decisive answer and the sincere diagnosis came in concentrated and expressive sentences in President Asad's speech to the People's Assembly when he said that Damascus has not authorized anyone to negotiate with Israel on the issue of

peace, where there has been no progress because of the lack of an honest broker and because of Washington's pressure on the weak Israeli government, and when he stressed the Iraqi people's right to resistance...."

"The Solution Lies in the United States Leaving Iraq"

Salim Abbud, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, commented (5/11): "Iraq is in great need of concerted efforts by all regional and world states to help it at the economic and security levels before liberating it from the occupation. This occupation is the cause of all the bombings that are claiming the lives of thousands of people and prompting thousands of Iraqis to leave Iraq every month.

"The world must break its silence toward what is happening and toward the United States' acts of intimidation. The world must first search for the reasons that led to the destruction of Iraq and to the tragic situation that is emptying Iraq of its people. All previous and future conferences on Iraq will not achieve the desired progress unless the cause, that is to say, the occupation, is dealt with. The Bush administration is giving the world the false impression that it seeks to address the deteriorating Iraqi situation, while in fact it seeks to address its own deteriorating situation in Iraq, in the United States, and in the world....

"The Bush administration stands behind the bloody bombings and sectarian conflict, which are likely to spread to other states in the region....

"The Bush administration did not seek to bring the Iraqi regime down as it claimed. The toppling of the regime was only an alleged goal, which the administration declared many times through Bremer, Rumsfeld, and Dick Cheney. In fact, this administration destroyed the security, political, economic, social, and cultural structure of a state. The Iraqi situation is much more serious than an occupation....

"At the Sharm al-Sheikh conference, Secretary Rice called for supporting Iraq in return for a commitment by the Iraqi Government to work to achieve national reconciliation. She made this call even

though everyone knows that the US army controls everything in Iraq and that the Iraqi people need no reconciliation, but need to drive out the forces which are supported by the occupation and other forces that entered Iraq. The operation of most of these forces follows directly or indirectly the opinion of the Mosad and US intelligence.... At the Sharm al-Sheikh conference Rice sought to absolve her administration of the responsibility for what is happening and will happen in the future...."

Corbin